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LITURGY AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

SUMMARY — Liturgy, or public worship, represents one of the main spiritual practices that offers a pathway to God. Liturgy is characterized both by a relation between liturgical form (texts and ritual formularies) and its meaning (holy things signified), and a relation between liturgical practices (textual and ritual expressions) and its participants (those that interpret liturgy in the act). This contribution clarifies the structural cohesion of form, meaning, practice and participation from a hermeneutical perspective, as informed by the anthropology of the French philosopher Ricoeur. In this account of liturgy as spiritual practice, five hermeneutical steps will be taken. First, the history of liturgy will be clarified by focussing on some problems of etymology, development and adaptation. This procedure is critically reflected in a second step, that elucidates a liturgical dialectic of text and action. A third step discusses liturgy from an aesthetical and dramatic perspective; a necessary view to understand liturgy as an enacted practice. Fourthly, the moral qualities are clarified that are assumed to link the practice of liturgy to the identity of participants. A fifth step concludes the hermeneutical procedure by indicating the religious significance of liturgy by assessing its call and response structure and ultimate translucency of God. In their coherence, these five steps represent a hermeneutical analysis of the spiritual practice of liturgy.

Liturgy is public worship and as such it represents one of the main spiritual practices. It is studied among a wide variety of disciplines, both in humanities, such as theology or religious studies, and in social sciences like anthropology or sociology. In understanding liturgy as a spiritual practice, typical religious aspects come to the fore, even if they emphasize such different aspects as the canonical formularies of ritual conduct, the sacramental focus of expressed beliefs, the pious attitudes of devotion, the clerical status of pastors and the communal service to God. In this complex of meanings, the spiritual practice of liturgy represents one of the pathways to God that is expressed in a sequence of solemn acts along which specific spiritual practices are ordered, such as prayer, exhortation, meditation, adoration, contemplation, music, or simply silence. Self-evident as these spiritual characteristics may seem from the insider perspectives of shared faith and church tradition; they often seem to be indistinct or

off-agenda from the outsider perspective of secular academic research. Spirituality increasingly comes to be defined in social scientific terms, as an inner experiential attitude towards life that displays an existential or religious quest orientation. Thus, it comes to be understood as the personal selection, interpretation and validation of an ultimate identity, be it in reference of existential or religious traditions or not.¹ Although these social scientific studies contribute significantly to our understanding of spirituality, they do not represent the core and conceptual breadth of spirituality when looked upon from a theological or philosophical perspective of liturgical practice.²

To rephrase it positively, social scientific definitions of spirituality could benefit from a humanities approach that after all harbours the classic study of spirituality. Waaijman has rightfully pointed out that there are two basic relations to be observed in liturgical spirituality:³ both the relation between liturgical form (texts and ritual formularies) and its meaning (holy things signified), and the relation between liturgical practices (textual and ritual expressions) and its participants (those that interpret liturgy in the act). How is this relationship of form, meaning, practice and persons to be interpreted? This is the main question that I aim to explore in this contribution. In characterizing liturgy as a spiritual practice, I will not elaborate the varieties that characterize Christian liturgy in its rich phenomenology of expressions and experiences. Although I will tacitly assume a Roman-Catholic type of liturgy, my focus here will merely be to clarify some philosophical and theological notions that in my view are crucial when looking at liturgy from a perspective of practiced spirituality. In

¹ For social-scientific definitions of spirituality, see the respective entries: C. Boechinger, 'Spirituality', in: K. von Stuckrad (Ed.), *The Brill dictionary of religion*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 1808-1809; M. MacDonald, 'Spirituality', in: L. Jones (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of religion*. Vol. 13, Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005, 8718-8721; W. Roof, 'Spirituality', in: W.A. Darity Jr. (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of the social sciences*. Vol. 8, Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2008, 59-61. For a recent overview of the fast growing psychological literature on spirituality, consult the many recent handbooks like for instance: R. Paloutzian & C. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*, London: The Guilford Press, 2005; K. Pargament, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*, New York: Guilford Press, 2007; J. Nelson, *Psychology, religion and spirituality*, New York: Springer, 2009.

² In previous contributions I elaborated a religious studies approach to the spiritual significance of religious ritual: J.B.A.M. Schilderman, 'Liturgical studies from a ritual studies perspective.', in: Idem (Ed.), *Discourse in ritual studies*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007, 3-34; Idem, 'Ritual praxis: Defining rites from an action perspective', in: H. Streib (Ed.), *Religion inside and outside traditional institutions*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007 (Empirical Studies in Theology 15), 125-145; Idem, 'Towards a generic model of religious ritual', in: L. Francis, M. Robbins & J. Astley (Eds.), *Texts and tables*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009, 101-125.

³ K. Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, foundations, methods*, Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 138-139.

doing so, I hope to offer a modest contribution to a discussion of the foundations of spirituality as Waaijman has pointed them out, namely as a shared interdisciplinary effort of theology and philosophy; as a critical reflection on the idea of spiritual experience; as a correction to popular and privatized concepts of spiritual meaning; and as an intelligible access to an understanding of spiritual traditions.⁴

In this contribution I will account for this by following some hermeneutic guidelines in my argumentation. One of the main points of attention in that endeavour implies the necessity to be historical and critical in defining spiritual characteristics of religious practices, and to develop a keen eye for the normative meanings that are inherent in its aesthetic, moral and religious characteristics. This in my view requires a humanities approach in the spiritual study of liturgy that is hermeneutical through and through. I derive this hermeneutical procedure from the anthropology of French philosopher Ricoeur.⁵ The choice for this philosopher is one for many reasons. Ricoeur without a doubt integrates the thought of many twentieth-century philosophers while introducing proper notions for explaining and interpreting classical texts in philosophy and theology alike. His unparalleled impetus to develop a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' draws attention to the need to critically deal with an understanding of tradition. This offers an outstanding opportunity to confront the textual, linguistic and narrative approaches in theological thought with the characteristics of modernity. In his magisterial 'oneself as another' Ricoeur draws together three core issues that typify the yield of his thought: action, identity and time. The problematic that these issues reflect will offer a searchlight for the problem

⁴ K. Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit als theologie*. Rede in verkorte vorm uitgesproken bij het afscheid als hoogleraar spiritualiteit aan de Faculteit der Theologie en de Faculteit der Religiewetenschappen op vrijdag 12 februari 2010, Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 15-19.

⁵ For a discussion of his philosophical work, see M.J. Valdés (Ed.), *A Ricoeur reader: Reflection and imagination*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; L. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Chicago-La Salle: Open Court, 1995; D. Kaplan (Ed.), *Reading Ricoeur*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008. For an overview and discussion of the significance of Ricoeur's philosophy for theology, see D.E. Klemm & W. Schweiker (Eds.), *Meanings in texts and actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, Charlottesville-London: University Press of Virginia, 1993; J. Fodor, *Christian hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the refiguring of theology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; D. Stewart, 'Ricoeur on religious language', in: Hahn, *The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 423-442; M. Wallace, 'Introduction', in P. Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred: Religion, narrative, and imagination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 1-32; D. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New directions in hermeneutical theology*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001; M. Jansen, *Talen naar God: Wegwijzers bij Paul Ricoeur*, Gorinchem, Narratio, 2002; S. Orth & P. Reifenberg (Eds.), *Poetik des Glaubens: Paul Ricoeur und die Theologie*, Freiburg: Alber, 2009.

of this contribution: how spiritual characteristics of liturgical practice are to be understood. Though Ricoeur does not offer a comprehensive theology, let alone a systematic reflection on liturgy, he does provide anthropological notions that will prove to be relevant in arguing a point that I want to make in this contribution.

In order to develop a systematic account of liturgy as spiritual practice, I will take five methodical steps that – I hope – may contribute to a hermeneutical study of spirituality. First of all, it is necessary to account for the history of liturgy as spiritual practice. Without this account, traditions of interpretation are overlooked which would fail the hermeneutical program by definition. Secondly, a critical step is taken in which hermeneutical interpretation reflects on the history of liturgy as spiritual practice. In trying to address this practice as practice a third step of aesthetical analysis comes to the fore, in which I will deal with the question of the attractiveness of liturgy. The fourth step reflects a major inference, namely that the spiritual practice of liturgy is of moral significance, and represents a core value to those that participate. Finally in the fifth step it is shown that a religious perspective is leading in characterizing the spiritual identity of liturgy. The latter step is not to be taken as the exclusive or final taxonomic characteristic to define a spiritual identity of liturgical practice. The hermeneutical approach implies that all steps represent a reflective understanding of spirituality in liturgy and avoid that it is defined according to the obvious religious characteristics that take liturgy from the outset only in its traditional and canonical form. The idea of this contribution is that there is a primordial significance to be attached to the study of liturgy as praxis, the hermeneutical analysis of which has to decide over the validity of its spiritual characteristics.⁶ What goes for spirituality appeals to liturgy as well, namely that is an action, a task, a participatory effort.⁷

1. LITURGY AS HISTORICAL PRACTICE

To start, I will elaborate a concept that understands liturgy as a spiritual practice by a community in which it configures its faith by ritual means of expression. I hope to sketch the relevance of this notion of practice for spirituality by indicating that this concept is historically implied in the terminology of liturgy. This is not meant as a historic overview of the notion of liturgy as practice.

⁶ Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 313-366.

⁷ L.-M. Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the mercy of the body*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001.

I will limit myself from the outset to a brief sketch of some origins of, and changes in, the terminology of liturgy as a spiritually relevant theological concept.

Etymological Notion

From etymological reference, we know that liturgy seems to have been understood in close connection with religious practices. Phrased in its simplest form, liturgy is 'worship by people to God'. The old Anglo-Saxon word '*weorthscipe*' simply means 'worth-ship', which literally is 'shaping worth'. In ancient times it indicated an attained merit; or the process by which a person gains personal quality. It then refers to the kind of status that is build on respect, resulting into expressed honour.⁸ This display of dignity and esteem has a religious denotation in worship in the sense that honour and respect is awarded to God, or to sacred persons and objects. However, – if one wants to follow the root-phrase – there is always a notion of personal respect of oneself involved as well.⁹ Therefore one can maintain that worship involves moral notions which turns liturgy into a notion that is relevant to ethical reflection.

The term liturgy has a characteristic practical religious meaning in its Judaic and Christian use. The notion of liturgy has its roots in Biblical language as it was used in Hebrew and Greek contexts. The Old Testament employs the notion of worship in at least three different wordings. The Old Testament first of all refers to worship in the Hebrew: שָׁחַח ('shachach') which literally means 'to be/become low'. It is a term that indicates the action of bowing one's body, or even prostration.¹⁰ In the Genesis narratives of Abraham this physical act of bowing down has clear connotations of social respect (Gen 18:1) and religious reverence (Gen 22:5). In the Biblical aversion against idolatry, '*shahab*' is also used (Ex 20:5). A second and frequent expression is אָבַד ('abad') (used 290 times in the Old Testament). '*Abad*' is the service that one shows to things, to people or to God. If '*abad*' is directed towards God it loses its connotations that are connected to serving things or persons: it reflects joy instead of slavery or bondage (Ex 3:12; 4:23; 7:16; 10:26; Ps 22:31; Job 21:15; Jer 2:20; Mal 3:14),

⁸ The personal address of magistrates in terms like 'your worship' or 'your honor' still reflect this personalized dignity.

⁹ Thus, if one 'attends worships' it is throughout a practice in which both men and God are involved. The practice involved is not so much the one that one attends, but the one that one signifies. The perceived 'glory of God' and the demonstrated 'glory to God' in these practices of worship refer to human acts of actively signifying God, and in doing so also signifying oneself.

¹⁰ R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer Jr., & B.K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, 2361.

unless the service is directed to other gods (Deut 7:16; 2 Kings 10:18-19, 21-23, etc.).¹¹ *‘Abad’* literally means labour or service; words to which the Greek words *liturgy* and *diacony* are closely related. *‘Ebed Jahweh’* refers to the theological motive of God’s servant which expresses the mutual obligation of fidelity between God and man. The word סָגִיד (*‘sagid’*) is an alternative term in the Old Testament, which indicates a display of respect and honour.¹² It is sometimes directed against idolatry as well (Dan 3:5-18).

The New Testament both employs *‘προσκυνέω’* which means bowing low or falling at another’s feet in reverence (like in Mt 4:10; Jn 4:25); and *‘λειτουργία’* that refers to service, both in the sense of ministry (2 Cor 9:12; Acts 13:2) and in the denotation of offering or sacrifice. In the wording of the New Testament a religious and a ritual notion of liturgical practice can be distinguished. Initially, the term *liturgy* had no religious connotations as it referred to a voluntary taking up of a service for a common good. The Greek word *‘λειτουργία’* (from *‘λατρεύω’*) refers to service which expresses the personal relationship of private and public concerns. It is a compound noun of the words *‘λᾱός’* (people) and *‘ἔργον’* (practice or action). This relationship of public and private matters initially was understood as a voluntary affair: materially or intellectually gifted people could decide to commit to a public concern by spending funds or by active participation. In subsequent denotations, the voluntary aspect gradually weakened as the state could explicitly demand qualified individuals to take up specific public services. *Liturgy* became to be understood as the assignment of public services to qualified people, especially in their financial support for choruses, athletic games, state ceremonies or wars. Later, any service could be defined in terms of *liturgy*. The religious notion of liturgical practice closely follows the connotation of public service in that it emphasizes the service of Christians to others as a duty following from one’s belonging to the Kingdom of God. Following this notion, *liturgy* has characteristics of a personal decision to believe: that is to faithfully engage oneself in public matters according to the root-symbol of Christian belief: the Kingdom of God. *Liturgy* is putting yourself in unselfish service of the Kingdom of God (2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:30). The ritual notion of liturgical practice refers to the actual worship of God in specific sacrificial actions as they are paradigmatically represented by Jesus Christ, the high-priest (Lk 1:23; Phil 2:17; Heb 8:6; 9:21). In the latter sense – and more specifically – the Eucharist is understood as *liturgy*. Though the religious notion of *liturgy* can be considered to be implied in the ritual aspect, one can maintain that the latter definition gained significance and guides the connotations we nowadays have of liturgical practice.

¹¹ *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1553.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2884.

In following the various terms that in the Judeo-Christian tradition became indicative of the practice of liturgy, the notion of service offers a kind of connecting link in the interpretation history of liturgy. It struggles with the question 'whom should you serve: things, men, or God?' The answers to this question are not as evident as they may seem; at least these root-notions of liturgy also define some of the basic religious and theological issues that became prevalent in this Judeo-Christian tradition. What is appropriate ritual service: an offering of cattle or of crops? Are we allowed to venerate images or should we abstain from that? Is there an analogy of serving God and of serving people? How do we deal with the opposite – but analogous – notions of slavery and service? Without answering these questions here, it is clear that liturgy as a term to indicate a practice ties up in a specific historic tradition of defining and interpreting this practice. Liturgy is practice, expressed in physical acts but connected throughout with complex moral and religious implications that ask for explanation and interpretation.¹³

Developmental Notion

Not only the etymological reference but also the historical development of liturgy as a concept can be understood as referring to basic characteristics of practices. The actual development of Christian liturgy, for instance, has been studied from a number of historical perspectives, usually phased according to the periods of the apostolic age, the patristic period, the (early, high and late) medieval period, Reformation, Counter-reformation and Baroque, and finally modern and contemporary times.¹⁴ In each of these phases, the practice of liturgy went through basic changes. We can study these changes with regard to the resulting consequences for the liturgical formulas and prescriptions. However, one can and should also take the perspective that these changes are – sometimes pragmatic – adaptations to varying and changing socio-cultural environments. Taking into account the perennial history and global dissemination of Christian liturgy, the question arises how liturgy adapts to its changing contexts of time and place: by fitting its socio-historical environment to its worship structure (assimilation) or by fitting this worship structure to its socio-historic environment (accommodation)?¹⁵ History by all means shows that it did both.

¹³ M. Merz, *Liturgisches Gebet als Geschehen: Liturgiewissenschaftlich-linguistische Studie anhand der Gebetsgattung eucharistische Hochgebet*, Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1988.

¹⁴ G. Wainwright, 'The periods of liturgical history', in: C. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold & P. Bradshaw (Eds.), *The study of liturgy*, London: Oxford University Press, 1992 (rev. ed.), 61-67.

¹⁵ The issue of adaptation reflects a historic missiological problem in liturgy how to attune culture and cult, for which terms were employed such as inculturation, acculturation, or

In the development of liturgy during the apostolic time, there are clear indications of strong accommodation by the initial church of its liturgy to – or even identification with – Jewish facilities for church, ministry, calendar, worship structure and sacraments.¹⁶ The main adaptive liturgical problem of the patristic period is probably the Constantine turn (313), which took Christians from their private communities into the public realm and which integrated facilities and status-characteristics of Roman administration in Christian liturgy. This accommodation was necessary to service the huge new masses of Christians, but it also institutionalized a clerical class that presided over these services, simply by employing the available cultural and political models. In the Middle Ages one of core problems was how to integrate the conception of liturgical mysteries as it crystallized from the discussions during the patristic period into a reception of ancient Greek and rising Islamic philosophy. The discussion about the efficacy of the sacraments regarding its intentional requisites and objective functions asked for philosophical clarifications and underpinnings of liturgical practices. It goes without saying that this conceptual process of accommodation to new philosophical insights had a significant impact on definitions of church, faith and liturgical rites.

Not only accommodation, also assimilation offered opportunities to adjust to changing circumstances. The influence of the Roman-Catholic church assimilated the culture at that time to a considerable extent, ranging from ritual prescriptions of daily life to liturgical ceremonies that celebrated the major political events. It permeated reality as the obvious frame of reference for religious practices. The Reformation took up the religious challenge that was implied in the far-reaching adaptive mechanisms of these religious practices. The Reformation criticized the abundant and even excessive ritual expressions in liturgy and its imminent merger with secular issues and interests. It asked instead for a more close and authentic approach of the core elements in Christian worship. In a return to the biblical foundations of faith and worship the Reformation reformulated its socio-cultural environment anew. This Protestant adaptation process can be characterized as an accommodation process with regard to a re-sourcing in its Biblical foundation that led to new and more austere liturgy.

enculturation. My aim is not to revive this discussion but to clarify two logical positions in cultural exchange that in my view are hermeneutically relevant. For that I refer to Piaget, who employs the term adaptation in his research of cognitive development to clarify the interactive relationship between an organism and its environment, where an organism may integrate new environmental observations in existing cognitive structures (assimilation), or in new patterns of understanding and fit to the existing environment (accommodation).

¹⁶ J. Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public services and offices in the earliest Christian communities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

However, it also has characteristics of assimilation in the changing religious culture that it brought about by dissociating liturgy from what was seen as accessory, secularized or irrelevant to a biblical understanding of worship. The Catholic defensive reaction to the rigid adaptation of protestant churches was expressed in an exclusive focus at its liturgical identity. During the phase of Counter-reformation and Baroque the Congregation of Rites was established and gained strong influence. Liturgical practices became characterized both by a clerical focus on consecration activities and by popular participation in para-liturgical practices.

In modern times Christian churches demonstrate a variety of liturgical practices. One can distinguish on a continuum at one pole those churches that maintain strict orders for worship that are considered essential to their respective confession, and at the other pole those churches that have flexible liturgical prescriptions that connect worship and confession in a more flexible manner. Churches at the first pole are 'liturgical churches': they subordinate the specific form of liturgy to the confession. Liturgical forms are at the centre of worship; symbolized for instance by the central position of the altar. They have fixed formulas for prayer, Mass-order and specific rites, strictly vouchsafed by a strong church agency. Roman-Catholic, Eastern-Orthodox, the Oriental (non-Chalcedonian) Church, some Anglican and some Lutheran churches can be called a liturgical church. At the other pole there are 'free-worship churches', which principally distinguish between confession and worship and therefore can be more flexible in adapting liturgy to specific circumstances. They tend to be economical in their ritual expressions, and leave room for adaptation to local insights and communal forms of authority. Confession is important but it is not the umbrella term for all worship. Most protestant denominations can be considered free-worship churches. They have an 'order of worship' but as compared to the liturgical churches, it is not as central to their religious self-definition. One could hypothesize that liturgy in free-worship churches is characterized by a disposition towards continuous accommodation, whereas liturgical churches may be more susceptible to discontinuous assimilative processes of change. I will offer an example in favour of this hypothesis by shortly sketching one characteristic aspect of the liturgical renewal in the Roman-Catholic church in the twentieth century.

When Pope Pius X issued his *moto proprio* on church music ('Tra le sollecitudine', 1903), he employed the term *actuosa participatio* to indicate the necessity that all church members should be actively participating in church liturgy.¹⁷ The leaders of the Liturgical Movement (Beauduin, Casel) recognized this

¹⁷ <http://www.adoremus.org/MotuProprio.html>, retrieved 25-05-2010.

appeal as need for all faithful to engage in the mysteries of the church. And in subsequent documents, such as the encyclical letter 'Mediator Dei' (1947), this concern was officially emphasized, to subsequently gain a significant place in the decree on the Holy Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council 'Sacrosanctum Concilium' (SC).¹⁸ In this document, the need for active participation is not only repeatedly stressed (SC 11, 14, 19, 21, 26, 27, 30, 41, 50, 79, 114, 121, 124), but also specified as a participation both internal and external (SC 19), more conscious (SC 11, 48, 79), more fully (SC 14, 21, 41), more perfect (SC 55), more communal (SC 21, 27), more pious (SC 48, 50), more beneficial (SC 11), and easier to perform (SC 79).¹⁹ Therefore one can argue that the emphasis on *actuosa participatio* at least in principle motivates the communion-ecclesiology of the second Vatican council, at least for those who want to engage and actually do participate in liturgy.²⁰ A fact is that Pope Paul VI replaced the Tridentine Mass in 1969 by the '*Novus Ordo Missae*' that departs from new role-sets in liturgy. It explicitly defines liturgy as a church practice of signification by those that actively participate in liturgy. Accordingly, liturgy is defined in theological terms (SC I, 7) as follows:

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members. From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.

Also in church law, this public character of liturgy is emphasized, like in the new Codex of 1983 (CIC, can. 837, §1-2):

Liturgical actions are not private but are celebrations of the Church itself as the 'sacrament of unity', that is, the holy people united and ordered under the Bishops. Accordingly, they concern the whole body of the Church, making it known

¹⁸ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html and http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei_en.html, retrieved 25-05-2010.

¹⁹ Th. Maas-Ewerd (Ed.), *Lebt unser Gottesdienst? Die bleibende Aufgabe der Liturgiereform*, Freiburg: Herder, 1988.

²⁰ B. Hilberath (Ed.), 'Participatio actuosa: Zum ekklesiologischen Kontext eines pastoralliturgischen Programms', in: H. Becker, B.J. Hilberath & U. Willers (Eds.), *Gottesdienst, Kirche, Gesellschaft: Interdisziplinäre und ökumenische Standortbestimmungen nach 25 Jahren Liturgiereform*, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1991 (Pietas Liturgica 5), 319-338.

and influencing it. They affect individual members of the Church in ways that vary according to orders, role and actual participation. Since liturgical matters by their very nature call for a community celebration, they are, as far as possible, to be celebrated in the presence of Christ's faithful and with their active participation.²¹

The example of the liturgical renewal in the Roman-Catholic church redefines liturgy in ways that break with the ancient liturgical dichotomy of priests and lay participants with its respective roles of activity and passivity in liturgical practice. One can of course question the institutional impact of this change for the actual ritual participation of lay-people in church, but regarding liturgy, the change was effected instantaneously. Striking is that, though participatory and community oriented issues were at the middle of attention in theological discourse, the liturgical renewal was effectuated 'by decree' without any consultation of the faithful, thereby emphasizing responsibility in liturgical issues as a matter that is still left best to the discretion of the administrative body of the church. It is characteristic of the way in which a liturgical church both adapts to new circumstances while maintaining firm control over its order of worship. It 'steers' its assimilation by way of policy to avoid running the alleged risks of a gradual and decentred accommodation process of its liturgy.

2. LITURGY AS CRITICAL PRACTICE

In having drawn attention to the historical adaptation process of liturgy, I will now elaborate a critical approach to understand liturgy as a spiritual practice. Liturgy is not simply given by history, but reflects an ongoing practice of explanation and interpretation to appropriate this history as a tradition that is significant to present and future times. Critical-hermeneutic reflection refers to the explanation and interpretation of tradition, especially when problems of adaptation require this. The liturgical adaptation processes cannot be seen apart from an ongoing critical reflection on the interpretation of liturgy's history. This history shows that liturgy had always been a plural practice and as a concept was object of various interpretations that sometimes harmonized and at other occasions resulted in conflict. This variety that history displays reflects a fundamental inaccessibility of tradition as a unitary or unambiguous framework for contemporary action. Every tradition thrives within the contingencies that history describes. The pith of hermeneutics therefore is one of interpretative effort. Hermeneutic reflection at best represents an appropriation of reality in

²¹ *Codex Iuris Canonici*. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2S.HTM

recognition of the fact that the effort does not yield in ultimate answers. It by definition lacks the ability to gain control over the issues of life; it merely redresses the reality that it interprets.²² When I understand this philosophically, there are two sides to this critical practice. One side takes liturgy as text, that is, as a cohering representation system of (religious) signs handed down to us by former generations to guide our practice of liturgy. The other side takes liturgy as practice from which we interpret these texts in liturgical action. The two sides represent two critical perspectives to interpret liturgy. This I will now elaborate by employing some insights of Ricoeur.

From Liturgical Text to Liturgical Action

One wonders how liturgical practices have maintained their Christian identity throughout their perennial history, their global dissemination, and their conflicts at the numerous intersections of discordant religious voices. Even if one carefully focuses at differences between Christian churches of different confession, at different times and within various contexts, it remains striking to notice the similarities in expression and comprehension of elementary liturgical forms of meaning. How can one understand this identity of liturgy from the contingencies of history? One of the obvious explanations is of socio-historical nature: the Christian traditions deeply ingrained western culture since they were supported by religious monopolies, strong political liaisons, firm church structures and rigid pastoral authorities, and because these traditions were underpinned by the intellectual expertise of theological and philosophical schools. From a hermeneutical point of view however, universal explanations such as these are not appropriate. Ricoeur is one of the authors that stresses the necessity to take this understanding of history not as a mere objective reconstructing of past events but as an activity that gains its significance from the present. We may have knowledge of the past, but there is no universal historical agency that encompasses the positions of particular interpreters at given phases of history. Ricoeur recognizes instead that there is a collective memory prior to the memories of individual persons. We remember because our collective memory reflects a discourse that we put trust in. History then has characteristics of a 'testimony' of the past as it is given to us not so much in the form of historical texts as such, but as texts to be read, narrated and enacted by us at present times.²³ In trusting liturgical texts, we may take the moral and religious testimony that it entails as decisive for our

²² Z. Bauman, *Hermeneutics and social science: Approaches to understanding*, London: Hutchinson, 1978, 231.

²³ P. Ricoeur, *Memory, history, forgetting*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004.

liturgical practices. Let us have a closer look at the significance of this testimony in liturgical texts, both in its quality as (diachronical) trust in a recollection from the past and as (synchronical) trust in the dialogue of present discourse.

A critical interpretation of history has characteristics of a testimony recollected from the traces that the past has left behind. These traces are embedded in texts, or at least have a 'text-structure'. In liturgy, we are confronted with fixed orders of worship, popular songs and prayers, church architecture, paintings with well-known motives, typical ritual gestures, etcetera. These 'texts' cohere not only with regard to the signs that they contain, but also with regard to their mutual relationship, that is, as aesthetical and religious unity in liturgy. From the perspective of texts, liturgy is a practice of remembrance elicited by the testimony that it portrays and that it invites or even imputes us to understand. In offering this testimony, texts express a social bond over the generations, which acts as a basis for diachronical trust that embodies our obligation to the past. The fact that our relationship to history has characteristics of a testimony does not imply that history offers unquestioned prerogatives for action. A historiographic account has to validate or falsify this testimony. This account of history *first* bases itself on systematic collections of traces of the past. These traces embedded in texts are testimonial themselves but also relate to the interpretations of the historicist or liturgist, who collects, selects and archives them. Historical facts therefore are interpretations of recollections to be scrutinized not so much for their factual appearances at given times but for the position they are awarded in archives of historians at given times. *Secondly*, historians or liturgists relate these traces of the past in overarching views. In doing so, they take into account the setting of these traces as testimony by specific groups as they are attested to in the practices of these groups. This purposiveness of testimonies asks for a historiography that critically assesses texts from their significance for historical practices. In determining this significance, one should take into account the implied practical perspectives, such as those of action and suffering; of enjoying and enduring; of affirmation and negation. By taking these perspectives, the testimony implied in the text is scrutinized for its validity and reliability in the plural settings of history. There is no valid historical relationship to be established between remained memories without taking into account a dynamic of concordant and discordant voices over its testimony. *Thirdly*, in narrating a historian or liturgist is not a mirror of times bygone but a rhetorical agent, who favours or discards views of the reconstructed testimonies. Historians' main act is to rewrite histories. The research of history is interpretative, to be engaged in while taking into account the contingencies of forgotten or vanished memories, and witnessing the vicissitudes of

current positions, contexts and times.²⁴ Unlike the well-established liturgical texts suggest, the history of liturgical practices demands a critical account of interpreting the history of liturgy. There is no liturgical prerogative hatching out the history of liturgy. The history of liturgy is interpreted time and again as one referring to a shared testimony cherished by each generation anew. To explain the continuity of liturgy throughout Christian history demands that we take into account our social bond with former generations of Christians and of their testimony of Christian identity. Thus the belief-aspect of liturgy cannot simply be equated with an agreement on texts of faith, church, or ritual. It gains significance from the trust that it was awarded along the history of generations *as testimony crucial to each generation*. Critical hermeneutic interpretation guides us from texts to practice and therefore is a basic requirement to study the spiritual practice of liturgy.

A critical interpretation of history has also characteristics of a testimony in present discourse. There can be no bond with history without a synchronical trust that we experience in actually reading, narrating and enacting liturgical texts against the background of shared current knowledge and contemporary communal settings. This significance that historical texts have for the actual practice of discourse needs more explanation. One might consider the testimony of Christianity that liturgical texts reflect as a self-referential system of its own. However, this testimony can only gain significance as soon as one puts it into dialogue in rites, in prayer, in sermons, in music, in buildings, in reading religious texts, etcetera. It gains meaning because in interacting, this testimony invites to identify, to draw parallels or to contrast with texts from other times and contexts. Discourse is what puts the text of liturgy into action. Whereas the text of liturgy stands for a system of (religious) signs; the practice of liturgy addresses agents and invites them to decode and encode the text of liturgy. The actual decoding and encoding by liturgical agents is a practice of testimony itself. It attests the testimony enclosed in liturgical texts anew within the bond from which these texts are narrated and enacted. That testimony only survives if it is narrated in contemporary times within a communicative setting of shared knowledge and trust. While the text of liturgy is self-referential and relates signs in vested patterns, the practice of liturgy refers to a world beyond the text of liturgy itself. It implies the personal consciousness of the agents that participate, it refers to the socio-cultural context in which these agents live and to the institutional bonds and roles to which they are ascribed. These are all put into the perspective

²⁴ B. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The promise and risk of politics*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998; Idem, 'Paul Ricoeur', in: *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, 2005 (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/>, retrieved 16-12-2009).

of the reality of religious faith and the divine agents that are perceived to act from this reality. This hermeneutical approach of the practice of historical testimony in discourse is another way of defining a bond of liturgy. Ritualizing puts a faith into practice for which the bond of belonging is crucial.

From Liturgical Action to Liturgical Text

If I may conclude from the historical perspective that the liturgical text manifests its testimony in the practice of liturgy, what then is the significance of liturgical practice for the liturgical text? Is there a relationship of decoding texts in practices on the one hand and encoding texts anew from practice on the other hand? Hermeneutic analyses may display difficulties answering this question, since they have come to be applied mainly in the frameworks of narrative analyses. However, since the 'linguistic turn' in hermeneutics, one can observe a close resemblance between texts and actions.

This resemblance of texts and actions is expressed in three basic hermeneutic approaches from which the perspectives of 'author', 'text' and 'reader' respectively can be matched with the terms of 'agent', 'agency' and 'co-agent'. The first perspective is that of the author, the initiating agent. For this diachronic interpretation the agents' initial reasons, intentions and significations that fuelled his action would be indicative and decisive for understanding practices. Thus, we may for instance understand liturgical practice as significant *because* Jesus initiated the Eucharist at the Last Supper, or *because* evangelists Matthew, Marc and Luke report this as Jesus' crucial testimonial act of remembrance (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20).²⁵ Thus, if one understands that testimony as a 'world behind the text', the practice of liturgy can be said to be interpreted. However one could oppose, this approach merely identifies the agent (Jesus), not necessarily the practice (the testimony that it reveals) itself. Therefore, the second perspective is that of agency; that by which a practice is understood as practice reflects the issue that should be taken into account. Indeed, agencies have their own logic in selecting and relating signs from texts that initially do not necessarily link to an agent. That is especially the case if these practices are presented in the most common historical form in which they avail themselves, namely narratives. This 'world of the text' *'as it came to us'*, can be interpreted for its own sake, not referring to current reasons of action, intention and meaning. In that case, these practices are taken regardless of their

²⁵ For a more elaborated analysis, see J. Zimmerman, who analyses the paschal mystery from a Ricoeurian framework of hermeneutics: J.-A. Zimmerman, *Liturgy as living faith: A liturgical spirituality*, London: Associated University Presses, 1993, 36-71; Idem, *Liturgy and hermeneutics*, Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, 1999.

historical or current account and are simply being read as text. We could still understand liturgy from the evangelists' account but notice that the Last Supper belongs to the semantic category of meals that sometimes indicates Jesus' hospitality in the perspective of the Kingdom of God (Jn 6:1-13); or refers to confusion of bystanders (Jn 6:48-59), or to betrayal of particular agents (Jn 13:21-30). The third hermeneutic perspective to take is that of the co-agent, who represents 'the world before the text'. The co-agent is the one who is confronted with the action of another agent and thus becomes practically involved. Here practice is interpreted as opportunity for enactment. The interpretation may still be guided by the available agency of the text or its 'archaeology' from an originating agent. However, decisive is that this practice is re-enacted in order to 'recreate' a practice in an enrolling world. Thus one could understand liturgy from the biblical text of the Last Supper as practice of sharing, which entails a moral and religious obligation to re-enact Jesus' metaphorical testimony of an invitational eating and drinking in the practice of our lives.

Even if one would regard the triple world-perspective that texts open up as reference for practices, the question remains how a textual testimony integrates in the practice of our daily life. Why do we take our refuge to texts in the first place? An answer to this question relates to the time-perspective from which agents act in practices. There is neither practice nor interpretation without an agent who puts himself in practice from the past to the future. This obvious fact that practice has temporal characteristics in the agents' action is by no means accidental. It questions our abilities and disabilities with regard to time: we act now and we may act in the future, but we do not act in the past. On the other hand, we can reconstruct past action but not future action. Our intentions with regard to the future are open for choice but those in the past are open only for scrutiny. What is meaningful now may not have been so in the past nor will it necessarily be significant in the future. There is a double contingency involved in our perception of past and future. The past confronts us with an action contingency since it refers to what we know but cannot change. The future confronts us with an epistemological contingency since it refers to what we are able to change but do not know. Yet, at present we cannot outrun the past nor escape the future. We cannot but deal with time by giving meaning to what we *do know* from the past and to what we *can do* in the future. In signifying, we close this yawning gap between past and future.²⁶ In his hermeneutic

²⁶ In the active figuration of the past, reconciliation is possible (Ricoeur, *Memory, history, forgetting*); M. Duffy, *Paul Ricoeur's pedagogy of pardon: A narrative theory of memory and forgetting*, London: Continuum, 2009, 46-77). In the active figuration of the future, hope can be understood as the active working towards a future good, see R. Huskey, *Paul Ricoeur on hope: Expecting the good*, New York: Lang, 2009, 81-108.

anthropology, Ricoeur understands this signification from the figurative function of texts to interpret the time perspective in action. Narratives offer time perspectives for agents to interpret their action with regard to past and future. Actions are understood from their narrative structure as having a beginning, an end, and a plot in between, somewhat blurring the notion of reason as immediate cause of action. This narrative structure of action implies that we interpret practices from a plot-structure that unifies multiple actions from narratives into opportunities for action assessment and engagement.²⁷ To put it more simply, texts offer temporal models of action. This agency-character of narratives bears relevance for the encoding of practices. Texts *prefigure* action by offering narratives within the characteristic intelligibility of a plot structure. This structure offers a model that explains actions in terms of the relationship of causes, intentions, significations, effects and values at different but cohering points of time. Apart from this pre-figurative function of texts, there is also a *figurative* mode. Narration *in actu* (discourse) offers opportunities for agents to make sense of reality. Reality is not simply 'event' but 'our world' of shared intentions and significations. Historical time as understood from texts and passed down over the generations becomes human time as soon as it is narrated in an interpretation of actual practices. Finally, there is also a *re-figurative* function of texts to be distinguished. Like actions have (intended or unintended) consequences, so do texts. Actions create a future world as texts do. Like texts, actions are open for interpretation, even to the extent that actions offer alternatives for the text. Against the backdrop of a text, a practice recreates actions that challenge the interpretations of former times.²⁸

In the interpretation practice of agents, texts open up realities beyond their own scope. This inevitably leads to new texts, or in our liturgical discourse, they enable new forms of worship, new songs and prayers, new paintings, new church buildings, new rites. But they do so to the extent that they testify from a practice of liturgy. Decisive for that is the valid and reliable reconstruction of the testimony from history as testified by each generation anew, and the social bond of interaction in which we embody this testimony by discourse. But significant is also that we interpret the disclosure function of texts in their reference to the world that we live in, while taking into account that this world is

²⁷ P. Ricoeur, 'Life: A story in search of a narrator', in: Valdés, *A Ricoeur reader*, 425-437. Orig. in: M.C. Doerer & J.N. Kraay (Eds.), *Facts and values: Philosophical reflections from western and non-western perspectives*, Dordrecht, Nijhoff, 1987, 121-132.

²⁸ P. Ricoeur, 'The model of the text: Meaningful action considered as a text', in: *Social Research* 38 (1971), 529-562; Idem, 'What is a text? Explanation and understanding', in: J.B. Thompson (Ed.), *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 145-161.

narrated and enacted and cannot be seen apart from the dramatic structure of our imagination. This applies to liturgy in a crucial way. Liturgy as it is handed down over the generations has characteristics of a text to the extent that its testimony acts as a valid and reliable model for liturgical practice for the agents involved. In the adaptation problems of each time, the development of liturgical practice is not so much subjected to the vicissitudes of its context but opens up an intrinsic capacity for signification. If the pre-figuration of liturgical practices structurally hinders the figuration of its current practice at a given time and setting, re-figuration appeals to new interpretations for which the texts of liturgical practices may offer contrasts and incentives, even when its traditional meaning is not followed.

I will conclude this paragraph by stating that liturgy is a hermeneutical practice itself. Liturgy is a spiritual practice in which a testimony from liturgical texts is decoded and encoded within the dramatic structure of our imagination. This confronts us with three major questions that I will deal with in the next paragraphs of this contribution. One regards the practiced liturgical text itself that derives its quality both from its well-ordered structure and from its appeal to and suitability for appropriate action. What is a proper liturgical text? This question calls for an aesthetical reflection. The other question is of a moral nature, which pushes the variety of interpretations of this text of liturgy at the focus of attention. How are we to deal in action with various and sometimes even conflicting interpretations of church, faith and ritual in liturgical practice? This question calls for a subsequent ethical reflection. Finally, there is the question of the reality to which a liturgical text refers. What can we hope for if we put our trust in the liturgical text, taking into account that these texts testify and promise an ultimate perspective? Here a final theological question is at stake.

3. LITURGY AS AESTHETICAL PRACTICE

Liturgy as text is a critical human endeavour, so much we now know. However one evaluates the divine inspiration that underlies biblical texts, the spiritual depths of prayer, the magnificence of church architecture or the perennial quality of ritual, these texts – if I may frame them as such – gain spiritual significance as human creations. It is only in human activity that the embedded testimony of liturgy can be expressed and in critical self-reflection come to be understood. However, one can ask, how does this human activity that is implied and intended in liturgical texts actually evoke or create this appeal? One of the answers to these questions refers to the aesthetical aspects of liturgical practice. The hermeneutics of texts realizes an appeal to the extent that it is beautiful;

that it gives evidence of good taste; that is appreciative of performed art. In this paragraph, I will clarify what this entails.

Liturgy as Art

By now, we understood that ritual in liturgy represents faith in a communal and public way. In this representation, a double hermeneutical task is involved: one in which we decode a liturgical text and one in which we encode a liturgical text. In this double activity, the faith testimony of past generations represents itself for new generations. However, the way in which we give this *act de presence* in liturgy has specific characteristics of action proper. This activity is of ceremonial nature, following highly patterned processes of encoding and decoding. One of the ways to analyze these coding processes is aesthetical and perceives liturgy as form of art.

Is liturgy art? In order to avoid controversial discussions following affirmative answers, we should rephrase the question: if we look at liturgy as a piece of art, what do we see? Modern philosophical aesthetics do not answer the question of art definitions univocally. The main theories of art define it in various ways: art is whatever evokes an aesthetic experience, it is a vehicle to express or communicate feelings, or it is best understood as imitation or representation of a reality.²⁹ One can observe that definitions of art like these may focus at more 'objective' characteristics of art that relate to the reality-aspects that are represented, or appeal to more 'subjective' aspects that refer to the appreciative side. To offer an example of the last view, Collingwood takes art as imaginative activity in which the whole self is involved. Art expresses emotions though it does not necessarily arouse (these) emotions. As soon however as we do express the emotion ourselves, we confer an emotional colour upon the piece of art by which we create what it expresses. Therefore, the distinction of an artists' intention and the appreciative interpreter is transcended in terms of a shared aesthetical activity as it is facilitated by a specific piece of art.³⁰ In emphasizing this expressionist view of art, Collingwood avoids approaches like that of Tolstoy's painstaking endeavour to reconstruct the artists' intentions as milestone of beauty. But, arts always refer to shared aesthetics:

[T]he artists' business is to express emotions; and the only emotions he can express are those which he feels, namely his own (...) If he attaches any importance to the judgment of his audience, it can only be because he thinks that the

²⁹ O. Hanfling (Ed.), *Philosophical aesthetics: An introduction*, Walton Hall: The Open University, 1992.

³⁰ R. Collingwood, 'The principles of art' (1938), in: D.E. Cooper (Ed.), *Aesthetics: The classic readings*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 244-265.

emotions he has tried to express are (...) shared by his audience (...) In other words he undertakes his artistic labour not as a personal effort on his own private behalf, but as a public labour on behalf of the community to which he belongs.³¹

Tatarkiewicz calls for a more analytical definition of art that highlights elements that both refer to the artists' intention and to the effects among those that perceive art. He includes six characteristics of art: art produces beauty; it represents or reproduces reality; it creates forms, it entails an artists' expression; it produces an aesthetical experience, and finally, it produces some kind of shock. Therefore, art is: '...either a reproduction of things, or a construction of forms, or an expression of experiences such that it is capable of evoking delight or emotion or shock'.³² Art, and liturgy considered from an aesthetic perspective, refers to aesthetic intentions, to an aesthetic object – i.e. a piece of art –, and to an aesthetic response, related dynamically to a kind of 'emotional flow' that constitutes the unity of what we call an aesthetic experience.

However, this global answer to our question of the aesthetical quality of liturgy hardly suffices. Modern sourcebooks on art and aesthetics, seldom – if ever – refer to liturgy as art. What indeed would be the aesthetic object in liturgy? It could be anything, ranging from church architecture, spiritual music, liturgical furniture, ceremonial vessels and vestments, and pious decoration in fresco's or paintings. Roman-Catholic and Protestant views tend to diverge on the significance of these objects. These objects can be regarded as beautiful while religiously insignificant in themselves, that is, apart from their liturgical or religious use. In addition, if one considers these objects religiously significant that is, as holy, one runs pre-eminent risks of idolatry and engages in iconoclastic clashes of appreciation. Therefore, one can choose to reject objects as art form, but maintain an aesthetic value for textual forms and emphasize the beauty of revelation texts as Word of God. This narrative approach can indeed be aesthetically assessed as practice: the poems, parables and epics of the Bible, a rhetorical aptness of delivery and diction in reading the Scriptures, the proclamation in sermon using symbol and metaphor, an expressed devotional attitude and pious posture in performing rites and the administering of the sacraments. There is without a doubt beauty in the Scriptures and liturgy demands

³¹ Collingwood, 'The principles of art', quoted by G. Graham, *Philosophy and the arts: An introduction to aesthetics*, London: Routledge, 2000, 29. These kinds of expressionist's definitions safeguard against the idea that art can be defined in terms of non-aesthetic qualities. Therefore art does not so much require a discussion of qualities but one of the perceptions of qualities, as for instance Sibley holds. See F. Sibley, *Approach to aesthetics: Collected papers on philosophical aesthetics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 2001.

³² W. Tatarkiewicz, *A history of six aesthetic ideas* (1980), quoted by Hanfling, *Philosophical aesthetics*, 12.

religious empathy in narrating and acting, but is liturgy proper therefore to be considered an aesthetical object? To answer this question, I will follow a reversed route by indicating comparable forms of art that are regarded to be legitimate aesthetical objects. To start right away, one may notice that liturgy can only be art in an integrative and performative form. Every art requires a practice in which each element could be evaluated aesthetically, but in many cases, it is its totality that accounts for the experience that we have of an aesthetical object. We judge a book, a photo, or a painting not in the sequential acts implied in writing, photographing or painting but only as a presented unity. This however is rather different in the performative arts like music and dance. Here, the enrolling of action sequences is decisive to appreciate art. Here, art is characterized by a participatory extension in time. Joining in during a performance or leaving it on beforehand does not destruct the aesthetical experience altogether but seriously interrupts the emotional flow that it demands in following and appropriating the presented chain of actions. This is all the more so in case of theatre or film in which a kind of interpretation is carefully build up and missing details can seriously hinder the total experience.

As form of art, liturgy can be compared to theatre to some extent, though there are significant differences that demand attention. Liturgy shares with theatre the fact that it is a social and public gathering in which a performance takes place that people enjoy in certain ways. Both theatre and liturgy reflect shared intentions, norms, beliefs, and expectations that are guided by codes of action. These codes of action prescribe the performative pattern of action in terms of lines, scripts, plots, roles and characters. There is some spatio-temporal dynamic in which performed action 'on stage' intervenes with the dispositions of theatrical or liturgical audiences, but the codes of action guarantee a certain unity in genre, style, movement and tradition. However, as Hamilton points out, although theatre is inherently a kind of social activity, it assumes a rather sharp distinction between actors and audiences in which the latter usually do not require any level of skill in participating.³³ Theatre merely displays action and thus generates a public in the act. It usually demands of its spectators to be an engaged public but only in the sense of a silent emotional commitment. Participation in the performative action itself however is usually not considered appropriate. In theatre, the public is implied but not made explicit, that is, an audience has no lines, it is not present in the script or emplotted in a play, nor is its role or character described. In short, the audience that theatre generates is not staged, but is implied in a kind of mental screen on which a play is enacted.

³³ J.R. Hamilton, 'Theatre', in: B. Gaut & D. Mc Iver Lopes (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to aesthetics*, London-New York: Routledge, 2001, 557-568.

In liturgy, the art form at first seems quite similar. There are podia (liturgical centres such as the altar or the pulpit) that define or at least imply roles and rules of engagement, and that distinguish pastoral or ministerial actors and choirs from the congregation as such. However, one can hardly overlook the fact that pastors, ministers and choirs are part of the congregation. The congregation as such has its roles as well and is participating fully in the performance of reading, responding, singing, praying, and participating. In liturgy, there is no audience, and if one still would like to hold on to this term, it is a staged audience, that is, it presents itself publicly as part of the enacted play.³⁴ One can define liturgy as form of art by comparing it to theatre but only to the extent that distinctions of actors and audiences are put into perspective. This perspective is not accidental but appertains to the art form of liturgy itself. If liturgy is theatre, it is so in an ordered structure of shared lines, scripts, plots, roles and characters. Even if one would consider liturgy in religious terms as a play *coram Deo* one has to be careful. God is not appropriately to be considered an onlooker to a liturgical play, but as an involved actor, at least in an inchoative or invocative perspective that the congregation liturgically assumes and actually takes in a performative way. What is more, this perspective is not limited to God but probably involves a highly differentiated heavenly audience. Roman-Catholic liturgy illustrates this abundantly. Not only God, but also Biblical characters are enacted, such as Prophets, Judges, Kings, Poets, Jesus, Mary, the Spirit; or those from tradition like saints; or those that are believed present in some way such as the deceased loved ones. What is more, the fact that a divine audience is not only implied but also explicitly enacted is clearly presented in the liturgical codes of action that not only stage the congregation but also divine or at least 'heavenly' actors as well in their interaction with the congregation. Therefore, this religious solution for solving the problem that liturgy does not completely match theatre aesthetically has to be refuted.

To sum up, the definition of liturgy as form of art in terms of a distantiating of an artists' intention and the effects on recipients along the characteristics of an aesthetical object is somewhat blurred in liturgy. The performance in liturgy always has characteristics of an event in which one is personally and collectively enacted in relationship to implied ('virtual', supernatural or transcendent) actors. In other words, liturgy is not only an aesthetical object but also implies an aesthetical subject of interpretation. It is here where we can make a new step in the hermeneutics of liturgy as action.

³⁴ As we noticed, this remains controversial, as can be observed in the rather late and painstaking effort of the Roman-Catholic Church to define itself liturgically as 'actual participation' of all members of the church.

Liturgy as 'Act de Presence'

In looking back at the aesthetical comparison of liturgy and theatre, what comes to the fore is that it is an act of representation. The basic aesthetical form of liturgy is that it presents its own action. There are two aspects to this. First, liturgy is action, the characteristics of which I will clarify in the Aristotelian distinction of making and doing. Secondly, liturgy is imitation. With Ricoeur, I will show that this representation is an innovative process throughout.

Liturgy is first of all action. From the aesthetical perspective that I take here, we can question if this action refers to making liturgy (as art piece) or at practicing liturgy (artistically). This question demands a clarification for which Aristotle's notion of action is conducive. In Aristotelian philosophy, practice cannot simply be understood as a result of action. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we read 'Practice and making are different kinds of thing. The remaining alternative, then, is that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man. For while making has an end other than itself, practice cannot; for good practice itself is its end' (EN VI, 5).³⁵ The Aristotelian distinction of theory (θεωρημα), making (ποίησις), skill (τέχνη) and practice (πράξις) depends on the implied notion of purpose (τέλος). While theory has a purpose of knowledge pursued for its own sake, productive activity (making) has its purpose in some artefact that is realized only after a chain of actions has unrolled. Productive activity needs a design that strictly follows an elaborated plan to serve an end. This requires skills that demand technical qualities of an agent. However, one should understand these techniques in a broad sense of the word. They do not necessarily imply a utilitarian perspective as is sometimes maintained. An artist or an actor is also a producer, though he relies on aesthetical principles and creative routines in working out his plan. In productive activity, the end refers to the goal of an action whereas in practice the action is the end itself. Thus, there is a time perspective involved in distinguishing productive activity from practice. In making, the action requires a means after which utility an end is realized. This definition of making requires time as a measure of efficiency. Practice on the other hand locates its end at each moment within the action(-chain) itself. Though practice takes time, its definition is incompatible with notions of time and efficiency.³⁶ In other words, practice does not start with a plan or design but with a moral disposition that questions a situation with regard to its truth and value. Practice requires practical

³⁵ *Nicomachean ethics*, transl. W. Ross. (<http://virtuescience.com/ethics6.html>, retrieved 24-05-2010.)

³⁶ O. Babalan, 'Praxis and poesis In Aristotle's practical philosophy', in: *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 24 (1989), 185-198.

wisdom, which is a commitment of an agent that moves between the requirements of specific situations and the general values that guide action. Therefore, from an Aristotelian perspective, practice requires prudence in action (*φρόνησις*).

From this Aristotelian reflection, one can ask if liturgy should be considered as making or as practice. The liturgical text without a doubt should be considered as referring to making, but the activity that it facilitates is practice. The value implicit in the plan or design resulted in the liturgical text, and the enactment of this value in practice accounts for the original qualification of *liturgical* practice. It is the appreciation of this value in practice that relates text to practice. Ricoeur relates to Kant for establishing the aesthetical character of this value judgment that is implied in practice. In traditional aesthetics, this value judgment is first of all subjective and a matter of taste, while the value that is represented claims a universal character. However, how can one refer to specific and personal appreciations while one simultaneously appeals to a universal validity of the implied value? Ricoeur summarizes Kant's answer to this question in communicative terms:

Communicability is the modality of the universal without concepts; it is a matter of a powder trail, of contagion from one case to another. And what is thus communicated? It is not the rule, nor the case, but the game between understanding and imagination. Each of us relives this kind of debate, of conflict, between a rule and the imagination, which, in the sublime is found to be affected by overflowing, by the excess of the object over the capacity to include it, whereas in the beautiful there is an imagination of harmony. It is this contamination, this powder trail, which involves subjects in communion, in participation in the same emotion.³⁷

Liturgy as form of art is both made in following its liturgical design (*ars celebrandi*) and practiced in the appropriation and appreciation of its aesthetic value. It thus appeals to pleasure and joy in enacting the liturgical action-chain, and it unchains an imaginative power to the extent that it touches and releases the value that it displays. If none of these dispositions are addressed, liturgy can be criticized for failing to achieve action or performance quality.

As I noticed, liturgy is not just action but one of a specific kind, namely imitated or represented action. This imitation needs to be properly understood. It not only repeats actions from the past but – due to the interpretative process involved – also recreates the action that it presents. Ricoeur's notion of representative action consists of a threefold 'mimesis' that subsequently refers

³⁷ P. Ricoeur, 'Arts, language and hermeneutic aesthetics (herméneutique esthétique)'. Interview with Paul Ricoeur conducted by Jean-Marie Brohm and Magali Uhl, September 20, 1996 in Paris. (<http://www.philagora.net/philo-fac/ricoeur-e.htm>, retrieved 24-05-2010)

to the reconstruction of action, the presentation of action and the renewal of action.³⁸ *First*, representation is reconstruction, a capability to understand what needs to be understood and done. As condition of every hermeneutics, one has to understand the semantic, symbolical and temporal dimensions of action. Action demands knowledge of its conceptual and linguistic structure, of the fact that it is based on intentions and will, and that this has consequences for the reality in which we live. It furthermore demands symbolic translucency for the context of action, the codes of which reflect the world as one of choice. To that comes the understanding that time is not simply an objective measure to follow the sequence of our actions, but that time is narrated, put into a semantic and symbolic perspective in such a way that we are able to understand and communicate our actions as relevant and significant contributions to the world in which we live. *Secondly*, representation refers to the ability to present an action as integrated form. It is enacting (narrating) not only as 'my-act' ('my-story') but also as an effort to integrate it as role (voice) in a totality from which it makes sense (narrative). Presentation therefore is always a creative act to the extent that this effort succeeds. It demands a synthetic capacity to adequately encode an action from its elements and shape it flexibly in an order that facilitates a recognition of its significance. This encoding process is thus one of imagination. This of course can only be done in view of the creative opportunities that language itself offers for communication. Actions and texts are polysemic: they entail more than just one meaning and express a surplus of meaning whenever an action is enacted or a text is narrated. As soon as actions or texts are communicated, they facilitate a poetic function that portrays them against a background of living language. This poetic function of communication gives actions and texts their appeal; not only fuelled by desired effects but also encoded with a specific interest in its intrinsic value. Communication is not merely an instrument to be used for its functional opportunities of utility but it also reflects a basic dichotomy of signs and objects that installs the polysemic significance of actions and texts as such. In Jacobson's dense terminology of language as communication, the poetic function puts the message at the centre of communication by projecting the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection (metaphor) to the axis of combination (metonym). Poetic style relates the temporal aspect of communicating a message (its explanation in terms of cause) to its spatial aspect (its semantic choice on the basis of similarities or contrast).³⁹ Thus, there is no

³⁸ P. Ricoeur, *Time and narrative*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984 (Vol. 1); 1985 (Vol. 2); 1988 (Vol. 3).

³⁹ R. Jacobson, 'Linguistics and poetics', in: T.A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Style in language*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966, 353.

blueprint that overarches a signifying order. We simply have to deal with living language in which time is always enacted in a coherence of history and fiction, memory and hope. *Thirdly*, representation is renewal of action. Although we reconstruct our action from the past and present it with the help of imagination, it has actual consequences for the world in the sense that it reshapes it. In presenting an action we not only communicate but also refer to the world and sometimes change it: the inherent claim is not only one of sense but also of reference. To the extent that an action is well-ordered, tastefully, beautifully enacted it may create new links with the world since we can only appropriate it by imagination. Here, especially the metaphor is at play. The appeal to imagination refers to new sequences of combination, thereby innovating language and blazing new routes of imagination.

Liturgical action represents action. These actions may refer to prayer, rites, readings, rhetoric as it comes to us from the past and we represent it for the testimony that it entails. However, unless we simply regard it as mnemotechnical or mechanical technique we also have to discover its significance from the sketched types of representation. One of the opportunities to do so is to introduce once again the theatrical form, but now in the form of drama and especially tragedy, that Aristotle regards to be the highest form of aesthetical representation.

Liturgy as Drama

The Greek expression of *δράμα* means action, especially in the form of enaction, that is making action object of action. Aristotle understands drama as imitation of action in theatrical form (*μιμήσεις*). Drama refers to several genres. Thus, a comedy takes people worse as compared to daily life, whereas tragedy understands them as better. According to Aristotle, tragedy presents an ideal-type of imitation. In his *Poetica*, he refers to tragedy as:

...the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal actors, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these – thought and character – are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends. Hence, the Plot is the imitation of the action – for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. By Character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be, a general truth enunciated. Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality – namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song. Two of the parts constitute the medium of imitation, one the manner, and three the objects of imitation. And these complete the first. These elements have been employed, we may say, by the poets to a man; in fact, every play contains

Spectacular elements as well as Character, Plot, Diction, Song, and Thought.
(Aristotle, *Poetica* VI)⁴⁰

In tragedy as Aristotle describes it, making and practicing are connected. Without making there is no expression, no style nor effect. Without mimetic technique, there is no significance for daily life and the dramatic effect fails to meet its cause. However, without practice, the plot fails to bestow on a character its moral quality. It is exactly the unity of making and doing that determines the quality of tragedy. Aristotle clearly elaborates this in his six qualities that vouch for the aesthetic experience of tragedy. Put into order of importance, they are: plot (*μυθος*), character (*ἦθος*), thought (*διάνοια*), diction (*λέξις*), music (*μελοποιία*), and spectacle (*ὄψις*). There are specific requirements, especially for the plot, that account for the dramatic effects and that offer crucial requirements to perform drama aesthetically.

Whatever an elaboration of these requirements of good tragedy requires for good drama, for our issue a more significant question now comes up. If tragedy is rightly considered to be the appropriate form of theatrical drama, can liturgy proper be considered from this tragic perspective? The question is controversial since we tend to associate liturgy solely with divine or biblical agents. For instance, a Christian understanding of Jesus as a tragic hero surely has a basis in biblical, and especially prophetic and wisdom narrative, but the tragic metaphor fails precisely in the ritual representation of his acts as understood from our testimony of Jesus' life, death *and* resurrection by God. Why? Classic Greek drama requires a tragic hero who experiences a change of fortune based on some fatal error of judgement (*ἁμαρτία*) that is usually based on heroic pride (*ὑβρις*) which challenges the gods who then pass divine judgment in more or less punitive form (*δίκη*). From a Christian perspective, this cannot refer to the divine *persona liturgiae* of Jesus Christ, who is regarded to be without sin and not prone to pride or other vices that characterize man. Moreover, Jesus is not subject to bad fate and divine punishment, on the contrary. If there is one crucial divine judgment that is represented in Christian liturgy, it is Christ's resurrection. However, as I noticed before, in the act of representation we are not merely an audience watching a heavenly play but actors ourselves. That is, by participating in liturgy we stage ourselves dramatically, for good or ill. That is, we try to understand what it is to lead a life that will end at a given moment, we try to cope with errors and vices, we deal with emotional ambivalences that the reversals of life events necessarily invoke, and we pass on what is of value. This is not to say that we are tragic heroes ourselves by (liturgical) definition,

⁴⁰ *Poetics*, transl. S. Butcher. Section I, part VI. (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html>, retrieved 24-05-2010)

but I merely want to highlight here the fact that in the plots of our daily actions we search for something serious and universal that is found in the represented actions. This indeed is the basic characteristic of tragedy, at least as Aristotle defines it: 'Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions' (Aristotle, *Poetica* VI). The plot is all about a general truth (*καθόλου*) that is pursued within the vicissitudes ambivalences of life. Aristotle argues that universals can be discovered in particulars. Tragedy therefore is not about misfortune but about the human effort to understand and deal with universal truths as they are represented in the events and characters of the plot. This observation is significant for an understanding of liturgy as drama. It says that in liturgical action we represent ourselves. We give 'act de presence' and in doing so we deal with the universal and serious truth that a religious testimony has for our lives. How we deal with this testimony, is a moral question that I will address in the following paragraph on ethics of liturgical practice. What this universal truth embedded in this testimony is, refers to a religious question, that I will clarify in a theological paragraph with which I will conclude this contribution.

4. LITURGY AS MORAL PRACTICE

The hermeneutical task to interpret the spiritual practice of liturgy demands that we take a next perspective into consideration, namely one of ethical nature that relates to moral aspects of liturgical practice. If history hands us a testimony, how do we deal with that in liturgy? If liturgy can rightly be understood as a challenge to our imagination, or even as drama that confronts us with a universal and serious truth that builds our character through the vicissitudes of life, what then is the ethical significance of liturgy? I will deal with these questions by clarifying a moral perspective in liturgy. I will do so in two steps. First, I will clarify an ethical scheme of moral qualities and secondly show how these moral qualities are enacted in – and as – liturgical practice.

Moral Qualities

In 'oneself as another', Ricoeur deals with ethics in close relationship to anthropological issues of personal identity. I will assume that ethics appertain to moral qualities of persons and that these qualities are both impelled and imputed in liturgical practices. If liturgy is considered as practice from the aesthetical perspective of making and doing, one cannot forego the practicing

agent. What is more, the serious and general truth that characterizes the dramatic and tragic structure of liturgical practice requires that I address the moral qualities of the agents who participate in this practice.

In describing the moral qualities of persons in relationship to practice one can firstly ask how agents are morally linked to practices. An initial observation that can be made with Ricoeur in this regard is that agents have a moral identity that is implied in their temporal existence. An agent experiences his identity as an appropriated permanence of time from which he infers his actions to himself. In this process of inference, two types of causality are involved. 'Idem-identity' refers to an inference that relates action to the spatio-temporal sameness of an agent's identity. Here, the notion of identity refers to the fact that in spite of continuous or discontinuous changes in an agent, we – and for that matter the agent himself – are still able to recognize that this agent is the same person. 'Ipse-identity' refers to the capacity to initiate action that is imputable to oneself and that one can be kept to by others. This notion defines an agent in terms of the responsibility for his action: reliable for oneself and for another.⁴¹ Idem and ipse identity indicate two causal links between an action and an agent. They are unified in a belief of assurance that allows agents to exist in both domains of causality and thus to be an integrated moral agent in practice ('attestation'). Therefore, if an agent has moral qualities we should be able to both identify these qualities as belonging to one and the same person, and attribute these qualities as depending on a lasting intention and responsibility of that person towards intentions, causes and effects of his actions.

One logically following observation is that the other is implied as the one confronted with somebody's actions and therefore undergoing or suffering the actions of an agent. In fact, this notion of passivity – one being subjected to another – is present as passivity in each activity of an agent. It follows from the notion of identity since identity requires that an agent identifies himself with somebody else or something other. Since that other is assumed in the narrated identity of the acting agent, he is liable to interpret the subjected other from a moral perspective. Thus, the dynamic notion of identity both implies and evokes a moral stance towards another. This idea of 'another' has characteristics of passivity in the action from which a person impels and imputes his identity. Or, to frame it in the reverse, 'passivity becomes the attestation of otherness' in the following triad:

⁴¹ P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 115-125; K. Blamey, 'From the ego to the self: A philosophical itinerary', in: Hahn, *The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*.

First there is the passivity represented by the experience of one's own body – or better (...) of the flesh – as the mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and foreignness. Next we find the passivity implied by that relation of the self to the foreign, in the precise sense of the other (than) self, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity. Finally we have the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is conscience in the sense of *Gewissen* rather than *Bewusstsein*.⁴²

Ricoeur clarifies this triad in ontological terms as a 'broken attestation'. Or, to put it in another way, otherness is not added to selfhood from the outside but permeates it from within, undermining ideas that persons are founded in themselves. There is no self, there is only selfhood, which is inclusive of the other. The first angle to take in the triad refers to the otherness of the body. The body is the place of one's belonging. It cannot be taken as an unchangeable identity, since in the encounter of physical suffering we experience that we are also patients of actions (*corps-sujet*). We endure passions that we cannot direct. Saying that one has a bodily identity presupposes that we are subjected both inwardly and outwardly to influences that we can only control to some extent. I am limited in designing and reigning my body: in many cases it contradicts my will and the direction of the ego. I can 'practice my body' but not 'make my body'. The second angle of the triad is the passivity of the otherness of other persons. Other people are not counterparts but constituents of the self. In Ricoeur's concise words: 'the multiple ways in which the other than self affects the understanding of the self by itself marks, precisely, the difference between the ego that posits itself and the self that recognizes itself only through these very affections'.⁴³ The other is implied in the addressee of my personal identity statements, namely as being the same that I was and will be (*idem*) and accountable for what I did and will do (*ipse*). The notion that I am affected by others in stating who I am permeates personal identity to the bone: in my language, morality and actions. The last angle of the triad is the otherness of conscience. The voice of the other is not coming from the outside but from the inside. In accounting for my identity, I am confronted with the fact that multiple answers are possible and that it is I who has to decide. In clarifying these choices there is always a perspective of suspicion present that asks for critical reflection. In such a hermeneutics of suspicion, the other is present, not only as my intimate other who might act as role model or act as contrast for my actions but espe-

⁴² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, quoted in D. Vessey, *The polysemy of otherness: On Ricoeur's Oneself as Another*, 2009. (http://www.daveessey.com/Vessey_Ricoeur.html, retrieved 14-12-2009)

⁴³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 329.

cially as the generalized other indicated in the Golden Rule or Kantian imperative.

The other being implied in each agent, is present in each situation that calls for moral action. This requires a practical wisdom to interpret particular situations as moral practices and to deal with them in an ethically adequate way. Ricoeur once again offers an appropriate analysis in his emphasis on prudence (*φρόνησις*), from which agents assess practices from moral norms and under recourse of ethical aims.⁴⁴ In doing so, Ricoeur distinguishes what could be called 'moral qualities'. These moral qualities can be defined by distinguishing on the one hand three lines of ethical argumentations: the teleological line that addresses ethical aims from the perspective of foundational values; the deontological line that addresses norms from the perspective of obligation; and the situation-philosophical line that addresses the actions themselves from the perspective of complex and problematic situations. At right angles of these lines of argumentation, Ricoeur distinguishes levels of analysis, framed in the ethical milestone: 'aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions'. From the teleological line of argumentation, an agent aims for the good as expressed in an agents' self-esteem, and aims for friendship with and for others in a societal setting of justice. From a deontological perspective, an agent applies norms to action as is reflected in an agents' respect towards himself which is rooted in autonomy, and respect for others which is rooted in reciprocity, both of which are safeguarded by applying principles of justice. Finally, from a situational-ethics perspective an agent acts within the vicissitudes of a situation that may lead to conflicting aims or aporia's of duty. When there is no secure norm to meet this duty then aims or values offer the source and recourse for obligations. In taking these three perspectives, an agent balances ethical aims by letting them pass through the sieve of the norms in applying them to practices. In doing so, conviction ultimately takes the lead in the moral judgment over an issue in a situation of conflict.⁴⁵

Thus, moral qualities require a balance of values and norms, as guided by convictions that infer this interpretation to the moral identity of an agent. However, in the setting of aporetic situations these convictions offer no philosophically concluding evidence for guidance in moral action. Our action in

⁴⁴ Ibid., 169-296. I will not follow Ricoeurs denotation of a teleological orientation as ethics and a deontological orientation as morality, to avoid any confusion about the current meaning of this distinction in which morality normally is taken as the orientation in normative practice and ethics is understood as the founding reflection on this normative practice. If one would understand Ricoeurs distinction of 'ethics' as 'good action' and 'morality' as 'proper action' the difficulty might be less.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 169-171.

these situations is to some extent tragic, since we tend to evaluate aporetic situations as characterized by mythical adversaries that conflict with our intentions. We value these situations as blurring the choices we make vis-à-vis the inaccessible constraints of fate. And we may even experience these situations as one's in which we redefine ourselves from acting agents into passive onlookers. Here, tragedy offers a narrative in-between between advice and resignation where tragic wisdom guides practical wisdom. It does so by recognizing and explicitly presenting the limits of guidance in action by introducing 'ethicopractical aporia' to which practical wisdom responds. It is here where tragedy appeals to conviction, making 'conviction the haven beyond catharsis'. It does so not by offering clear guidelines of conduct but by representing the conflicts that lead to moral problems that oblige agents to reorient their actions at their own risk and meet the ultimate limits that are implied in practical wisdom.⁴⁶ Ricoeurs effort to fulfil the ethical requirements of universality throughout contextual conditions and aporias amounts into what he calls with Rawls 'a reflective equilibrium': an attestation of arguing ethically while being faithful to well considered convictions.⁴⁷

Enacting Moral Qualities

The characterization of moral qualities ascribes actions to agents by designating these actions as good, obligatory and wise. In doing so, agents are imputable as persons, that is, they can be ascribed self-constancy (*ipse*) in their actions. What are the consequences of these considerations for defining liturgy as a moral practice? In answering this lead-question, I will first clarify the ethical significance of enacting moral qualities, and subsequently point out three modes of this enactment in liturgical practice.

What is the ethical significance of enacting moral qualities? This question first assumes that moral qualities are indeed enacted, that is performed, staged, re-presented. This seems to be at odds with their common denotation as founding argumentation in action. However, we find these moral qualities to be not merely formal attributes of mental reasoning processes but propositions that are embedded in narratives of various genres, such as epics, comedies and tragedies. Especially in tragedy, which as we saw Aristotle considered the ultimate dramatic structure, moral qualities are emplotted well. Moral qualities are characterized by a discordant concordance in a dynamic model of moral action and suffering, harmony and contingency, voluntariness and involuntariness, solutions and aporia's. The guiding line throughout this discordant concordance is

⁴⁶ Ibid., 243-247.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 287-290.

the characteristic that an action is imitated which is of a general truth, or – as Aristotle puts it – is ‘serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude’ (*Poetica* VI). But apart from the fact that we are confronted with moral qualities in narratives of different genres, there is a more basic distinction to be made. It relates to the fact that moral qualities belong to the reality domain that is governed by ethics while they are enacted in the imaginary domain that is governed by poetics. Enacted actions can be understood as metaphorical since they connect reality and imaginary domains.⁴⁸ This metaphorical transposition has ethical significance throughout. It for instance avoids formalism in ethics by putting moral qualities in a creative and even aesthetic context. It models these qualities by putting them in a plot-structure of a narrative to demonstrate their complexity while installing expectations of an outcome for better or for worse. It demonstrates the intrinsic link of moral qualities and the agent by putting the characters in the effort of creating their – and each other’s – identity, especially in the sense of achieving self-constancy. To the extent that liturgical practices are characterized by a dramatic structure, the moral qualities that are expressed in liturgy can be understood as metaphorical: pointing at real life in which they have ethical significance but poetically referring to them for the moment as imagined and staged dispositions, that is, as ritual.

There are numerous examples of these ‘moral rituals’ in liturgy. In the profession of faith one installs a moral identity by attesting to certain shared propositions of belief. In doing so, not only are the articles of faith represented, but also one’s identity to be imputable as a person with regard to these articles. In confession, one represents one’s moral qualities within the transgressions, vicissitudes, conflicts and aporias of one’s life in order to assess and revalue them. In petitionary prayers, one takes the perspective of the other, be it God to whom one directs a prayer or by morally putting oneself in the shoes of the other that is addressed *coram Deo*. In the public reading of religious texts, one is addressed from the perspective of the moral qualities of the characters in the presented narrative. In sermons this narrative address is clarified by impelling, that is urging or motivating to take perspectives of certain religious characters, or by imputation, that is by indicting a public with moral claims appertaining to their ascribed religious identity. In liturgical ‘rites of passage’ one pays respect to those that are in crucial identity phases: starting identity (baptism/birth), sharing identity (matrimony/marriage), or concluding identity (funeral/death). In these rites of passage the moral stance reflects an attestation of central and serious value in which one states to be imputable to take care of the other. One can easily supplement examples like these with many others, which would

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and narrative*. Vol. 1, 46.

require an elaborated model of moral qualities applied to an analysis of liturgical practices. The point here however is merely to demonstrate that one can understand liturgy as a moral practice in a metaphorical sense. Liturgy links the real world of daily action, to be scrutinized from an ethical perspective to an imaginary world of dense representation, to be evaluated from an aesthetical or poetic perspective. As far as liturgy has significance from an ethical perspective, it primarily deals with moral qualities by enacting them. It represents moral qualities in terms of aims and obligations that appeal to the concrete lives of those that participate in liturgy. It asks them to look at their lives from the offered perspectives and guide them in that respect, while taking into account the disparate conditions of current situations. In respect of that, liturgy is a public presentation of a moral conviction.

If liturgy indeed has the sketched moral and ethical significance as enacted action, how is this enactment realized? In order to answer this question I take liturgy as a threefold poetic composition of moral qualities, by distinguishing between reference, mediation and invention, analogous to Ricoeur's notions of *μιμήσεις*¹, *μιμήσεις*², and *μιμήσεις*³ respectively.⁴⁹ Reference in liturgy refers to the semantic, symbolic and syntagmatic structure that prefigures our understanding of liturgy. We understand moral qualities semantically by answering questions like 'who acts morally?', 'how does one act morally?', 'why does one act morally?', 'with whom does one act morally?', 'to whom does one act morally?'. These questions are implicit in (Bible-)texts, in sermons, prayers, rites, etcetera. They form its intelligible structure open for reconstruction. The structure itself is symbolic, that is, not logically denotated but to be understood by convention and open for multiple references. And due to the narrative structure it is syntagmatic, it is successive by an ordering of depicted morally relevant events that invite to imitate. Apart from this prefigurative aspect that enables us to refer to moral action, there is a figurative aspect of mediation. Mediation refers to a connecting of moral pre-understanding in the available 'material' of liturgy (narratives, prayers, objects, rituals) to the diverse moral characteristics of the situation in which one lives. This is the central aspect of moral enactment that we regard crucial for liturgical practice. Why? It relates the 'moral

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54-87. Ricoeur's distinction of the mimetic triad follows his overarching question of mediating time and narrative. The reason that I choose to only label *μιμήσεις*² as mediation is that it can be regarded as the crucial phase that answers this overarching question. This is probably also Ricoeur's view: 'We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of configured time' (*Time and narrative*. Vol. 1, 54). This citation also clarifies that the mimetic triad equals the distinction of prefigurative, figurative and refigurative functions of narratives as temporal models of action (see the second paragraph).

capital' of a tradition to the here and now of those participating in liturgy. And it does so by imagination. Ricoeur here refers to the 'kingdom of the as-if': by actually configuring prefigured material in a meaningful way, imagination is stirred. It is the core skill of an *ars celebrandi*. The semantically implicit questions of the 'who, why, how, with whom and to whom' of moral action are answered in a rhetorically varied and appealing way before a liturgical public. In doing so, it re-describes the moral situation in which this public finds itself. It blazes a trail by arranging moral qualities in such a way that in face of discordance, concordance is realized. Since mediation belongs to the realm of the 'as-if' there is every opportunity to arrange represented qualities, goals, means, agents, interactions, circumstances and (unexpected) results at different time perspectives. A moral necessity is put to the fore in which conceptual clarification and succession in time are related in a unity of narrative or in the plausibility of rite. Configuration is varying what is univocally given. It demands that we take specific perspectives from which new things can be seen. Consequently, it impels or imputes us to do what is actually imagined. It is here where invention finally comes in as a third phase of enactment. The 'as-if'-time of imagined action and the 'real-time' of presented action meet by invention. Invention is the inscription of imagined time into real-time. In our case, it requires an inscribing of the moral qualities of personal identity that were configured in liturgical practice, into the identity of selfhood as we experience ourselves in the life-world. To be clear, there is no direct line between liturgy and daily practice in the sense that moral qualities presented in liturgy bluntly act as model for moral action in daily life. The notion of 'invention' merely assumes that we creatively redefine our identity in terms of moral qualities. As soon as the discourse of moral action requires it, we attest this identity anew in the effort of designating our actions and those of others as good, obligatory and wise. We do so not without fear and pity, and usually in the tragic pursuit of a general truth in which these emotions are purged.

5. LITURGY AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Finally, there is the question of the reality to which a spiritual practice of liturgy refers. What can we hope for if we put our trust in the testimony of the liturgical text? Is liturgy a significant act or one in vain? Here a theological question is at stake. According to the aesthetical perspective of liturgical practice, the question of liturgy is not only a question of 'good taste' but also one of a general truth pursued. In elaborating the moral perspective, it became clear that this general truth firmly relates to our identity. As 'firmly' means 'the other implied', we are moral beings to the bone in referring to one another.

In looking back on the views that both perspectives offered it also became clear that ultimate answers in poetics and ethics cannot be given on beforehand. The pursuit of an ultimate perspective on beforehand seems to have tragic characteristics: a well-practiced effort at best. Does that observation hold for the religious perspective of liturgical practice as well, or are there ultimate perspectives that go beyond? In dealing with this question, I will address three issues. One relates to the relationship of morality and religion. The second issue refers to a basic religious structure of call and response. The third issue is that of the ultimate which addresses both our sufficiency and insufficiency in signifying God.

Morality and Religion

If one refutes modern tendencies to reduce religion to morality, the first question to answer is what distinguishes religion from morality. In the case of liturgy, this question has a particular significance. Though the liturgical acts etymologically have a moral significance – like we saw in the first paragraph of this contribution –, the whole scope of religious ritual seems to centre on a reality that surpasses the discourse of practical action. In the previous paragraphs, we looked at liturgy as enacted action that mediates the reality domain governed by ethics through the imaginary domain governed by poetics. However, does this imply that morality, and beauty for that matter, provide necessary and sufficient perspectives to define liturgy as religious practice? This question could easily be answered in the negative by simply pointing at a transcendent perspective that indeed is said to permeate liturgy and that refers not only to a reality set apart from our moral obligations, but also to a reality far beyond our imagination. However, if one understands this reference as action – a perspective that indeed accurately describes liturgical practice – we are confronted with both an ethical and a theological issue. The ethical issue will confront us with a tension of relativism and universalism. The theological issue raises the issue of human and divine ontology.

The distinction of morality and religion confronts us in liturgy with a tension of ethical relativism and ethical universalism. Relativism holds that actual moral diversity (descriptive relativism) keeps us from a universal access to what is true and just (meta-ethical relativism) and withholds us from passing moral judgment towards practices other than our own (normative relativism). Universalism on the other hand holds that there are general ethical principles that – by definition – apply to anyone and that are therefore relevant for judging particular moral practices (cases). If one understands ethical reflection as a rational account of morality that is based on the universality of norms, then religious ritual is an extraordinary case. The rationality of ritual conduct seems

to appertain to conventions that are cherished by certain communities but rejected as insignificant by others. Therefore, if we consider liturgy as a moral practice, its religious characteristics compel to a relativist perspective of the moral qualities that are practiced in this liturgy. However, as we saw, from a Ricoeurian view one can understand this argument as faulty. Ricoeur can be called a universalist, but one who understands ethical argumentation as a dynamic process. The dynamic shows in the metaphor of the 'sieve', which says that aims need to be guided by norms in order to gain relevance for prudent judging. It does justice to 'cases' by understanding them as practices of agents whose convictions may prompt them to recur to aims as soon as norms fail to guide a prudent judgement within the vicissitudes and contingencies of these practices. The religious case of liturgy is not simply a case. At least, to the extent that universal ethical statements fail to address the 'celebrated' moral qualities in liturgy, one has to acknowledge the particularities of this case before a retreat into relativism. In our case, these particularities refer to a narrative structure of liturgy with readers in the effort of making sense of their own situation. And if they fail to adequately address this situation from a universal point of view, they recur to convictions that guide them with regard to the aims of their actions. It is here where a religious perspective – present in convictions – appeals to morality.

How is this religious perspective pursued? From a Ricoeurian perspective one can understand this as a figurative process, which Van der Ven⁵⁰ elaborates in the following way. Religious convictions bind together aims and norms by connecting them with religious themes that present these aims and norms both as gift and as orientation towards a future. In presenting these aims and norms within a religious narrative, moral qualities to some extent change. In this figurative process pre-moral, radical-moral and meta-moral aspects can be distinguished. In a pre-moral sense, religion determines the identity of a person as autonomous: a person has a freedom to act *vor Gut und Böse*. In religious narratives moral qualities are not so much available on beforehand, they are installed by confronting the freedom (to act) of one person with that of another. In a radical-moral sense, religion not so much emphasizes the authority of moral conventions. Actually, it does quite the opposite: it puts the plausibility and validity of aims and norms into the perspective of the particular. It are the parables from the religious narratives that not so much stress moral habit but have a counter-intuitive aim that puts moral conventions to the test, usually because they demonstrate the inadequacy of generalized norms within the contingencies of specific situations. Religion enables a person to criticise, radicalize

⁵⁰ J.A. van der Ven, *Formation of the moral self*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 13-21.

or innovate moral qualities. In a meta-moral sense, religion displays and confronts the boundaries of moral qualities in action. It does so by clarifying that moral practice is tied – but also committed – to a dialectic of activity and passivity, to a basic inaccessibility of personal intentions, aims and results of action, to the fragility and brokenness of the world. Religion offers a semantic and pragmatic framework of language to express these contingencies and to make the imperfect a theme of personal identity in contra-factual convictions. Liturgy configures this religious perspective in various ritual, narrative and rhetorical genres. In doing so, it demonstrates that the universal is only accessible throughout the characteristics relative to the convictions of committed persons.

In distinguishing morality from religion, a reflection of liturgical practices confronts us with a second theme. This is a theological issue, which refers to the ontology of man and of God. If liturgy deals with God, is there a God? An answer to that question is at stake in the very fact of liturgical practice: do we worship God, directed to His Glory, or do we symbolically pay tribute to one another and ourselves? In answering this question from a hermeneutical perspective, the implied ontological issues require a narrative approach. Ontology deals with questions of being, both in terms of 'sense' and 'reference'. Frege's classical distinction of *Sinn* (sense, signification) and *Bedeutung* (reference, designation, denotation) sharply distinguishes in language between unsaturated (dependent) entities (concepts) on the one hand and 'saturated' (independent) entities (persons, 'God' for that matter) on the other. Frege makes this distinction to clarify that while our referring maybe univocal, the meaning we attribute to it is polysemic. According to Ricoeur however, semiotic and semantic reconstruction are closely related. Discourse always displays a dialectic of sense and reference: because we are (entities) in the world we have something to say.⁵¹ Meaning is inclusive of the distinction between 'sense' and 'reference'. We can never escape our being affected and committed to the world in which we live. We get a glimpse of stating who we are and who God is from the perspective of texts, not of statements. While concepts denote, it are persons who refer. It is here where the metaphor comes to life: it refers as word but displays its polysemic sense and innovative aim as text in the practice of language.⁵² From Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework, one can indeed regard meaning as an umbrella term for explanation and interpretation. Explanation is the process according to which a text makes sense by ordering the parts of a text into a structure, whereas interpretation is the quest for a metaphor that makes the text understandable as referring to a whole. This posits the ontological question of

⁵¹ P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976, 20-21.

⁵² M. Gerhart, 'The life metaphor', in: Hahn, *The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 223-224.

God's being as question of personal meaning, to be addressed in metaphors and not in concepts. If there is a God, its ontology refers to *das relative Absolute*.⁵³ It demands both an explanation of texts that present God, and an interpretation of God's significance. Liturgical practice is religious to the extent that it establishes this illuminative presentation of texts (explanation) and inspiring quest for metaphors (interpretation). I will pursue a clarification of this perspective in the following subparagraphs.

Call and Response

If explanation and interpretation act as necessary – though not sufficient – conditions for defining liturgy as religious, this requires choices for specific religious narratives. These choices are fivefold as they appertain to specific religions, particular canons, certain genres, given texts and chosen metaphors. Many choices are possible; the one does not on beforehand exclude the appropriateness of the other. The Bible presents a multiplicity of perspectives that enable a *kerugmatik* and revelatory interpretation both in the First Testament⁵⁴ and in the Second.⁵⁵ As one illustrative and relevant choice of a hermeneutic approach to the religious character of liturgical practice, I will offer an example of monotheistic religion as it is revealed in the canon of the Old Testament, while focussing at the prophetic genre and limiting ourselves to vocational texts, choosing for the call and response metaphor in particular.

There is a certain range of genres in the biblical canon. Especially the First Testament incorporates a variety of literary genres such as mythic, narrative, prescriptive, oracular, eschatological, apocalyptic, chiliastic, hymnic, sapiential, and prophetic.⁵⁶ The choice for the latter genre is not one by coincidence. Prophetic genres posit the self as respondent to propositions of meaning. These propositions stem from the symbolic network of monotheistic traditions. The prophetic genre understands the 'I am' of the person as the position of a respondent. It posits the self as a 'summoned subject'.⁵⁷ The summoned subject is a person who is committed to a hermeneutic practice of religious call and response. In choosing for this prophetic genre, I assign to the metaphor of call

⁵³ M.J. Raden, *Das relative Absolute: Die theologische Hermeneutik Paul Ricoeurs*, Frankfurt a.M. etc.: Peter Lang, 1988.

⁵⁴ Th.L. Hettema, *Reading for good: Narrative theology and ethics in the Joseph story from the perspective of Ricoeur's hermeneutics*, Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996, 139-157.

⁵⁵ K.J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical narrative in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 119-272.

⁵⁶ P. Ricoeur, 'Towards the idea of revelation', in: L.S. Mudge (Ed.), *Essays on biblical interpretation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 73-118.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 262-275.

and response a religious significance for the issue of personal identity. The metaphor of call and response draws attention to a central characteristic of vocational texts, namely that they express an act of bearing witness. In fact, the juridical connotation is decisive: one is summoned to clarify – as if before a judge or jury – the truth of one's statement, especially regarding crucial events that show a difference or clash of opinion. Both the sameness (*idem*) of a person comes into play (was I really there?) and one's credibility (*ipse*) is at stake (can I really be trusted?). In his identity, a person both vouches for a specific statement that refers to an external event (*exteriorité*), and demonstrates his personal involvement from which he will not withdraw (*intériorité*). In being a witness the both are connected.⁵⁸ Freely following Ricoeur one might say that vocational literature stresses this unity as a dialectical process of communication between God and man. Addressing the call of God requires a personal bearing of a testimony (*témoignage*), whereas responding highlights that one actually commits oneself to this calling (*attestation*).⁵⁹ Prophetic stories do indeed narrate this, but on a more fundamental level, they also refer to the basic dialectic of faith itself. One hears God's call and responds by answering. On the one hand, this is highly personal since one's identity is at stake. On the other hand, this vocational structure is public, since it entails a mission for which one stands with this identity and can be openly scrutinized. This is a nuclear characteristic of what liturgy configures or ritualizes.

According to Ricoeur, prophets belong to the category of 'mediators'. As priest-stories refer to performed cult, kings-narratives to attained conquests and judges to displayed justice, so do prophets mediate a divine judgment. They explain a contemporary situation by clarifying it vis-à-vis the testimony that is handed over from former times. In addition, these prophetic stories interpret this testimony in terms of a judgment before an audience. Maybe unlike popular assumption suggests prophets derive their authority not by their own achievement. The First Testament tends to depict prophets as sufferers. They are prophets not because of their personal qualities but in spite of them. Prophets usually fight their religious destiny; or to frame it in the wording of previous paragraphs, they tend to be tragic heroes. God calls them in spite of who they are. Prophets are reluctant respondents. This Biblical narrative element strikes me as significant for the moral nature of call as an appeal to the freedom of man to respond. Ricoeur points at the narrative dynamic of the personal character of calling as contrasted to the impersonal response. On the one hand,

⁵⁸ P. Ricoeur, 'Experience and language in religious discourse' (transl. J.L. Kosky), in: D. Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the 'theological turn': The French debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

⁵⁹ Jansen, *Talen naar God*, 64-69; 84-87.

calling is usually stated in the first-person, in the dialogical structure of the I-act of God's Word, and the unique confession of an I-will as a response to this call. On the other hand, response is usually given in the third person, highlighting that authority is not based on personal merit but on acceptance that the call is from beyond. In an exegetical analysis of these vocational texts, the summoned subject is presented in a specific configuration.⁶⁰ First, there is a confrontation with God that puts the subject into perspective: the prophet is insignificant in relation to God. What follows is an introductory speech in which God expresses His identity as relevant to the identity of the subject. Subsequently there is the assignment for a mission by God, in which however the prophet contrasts as an initial response the importance of this commission with the insignificance of his identity as a subject, which then God reassures again. Fact is however that the prophet is selected, that is, lifted out from his environment to address his own context anew. This address has characteristics of an instruction, remembering the community in which he was an ordinary member before that, while emphasizing the commitment to the communities' testimony, God's covenant with them, recalling their shared vocation, and pointing at a religious future. Finally, in this commemorative act, a prophet is recognized as member of the genre, an example of prophetic speech.⁶¹

If we can employ the image of call and response as an adequate metaphor for the identity characteristics of faith, this also appertains to the enactment of this faith in liturgy. The vocational structure of liturgical practice indeed shows a likewise structure of call and response in which participants act as summoned subjects who celebrate their vocation and mission as they understand this as originating in God. Liturgy is a communicative practice for which the call and response structure can be crucial in the following way. The call structure of liturgy arises out of the texts and practices that confront participants. In this reading, hearing is implied. These texts and practices refer since they reconstruct this call as coming from God, and ask for a decoding of signs that lie embedded in these texts and practices ($\mu\mu\eta\sigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma^1$). The response structure of liturgy results from the participants' appropriation of these texts and practices in their own lives. These texts and practices have a capacity for invention, that is, they appeal to an encoding of signs anew as personal response to 'God recognized' in their own lives ($\mu\mu\eta\sigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma^3$). Liturgy performs the crucial mediating

⁶⁰ Ricoeur refers here to an exegesis by N. Habel of the calling of Gideon (Judg 6:11-17); Moses (Ex 3:1-12); Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10); Isaiah (Isa 6:1-13); Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3,15), and Second Isaiah (Isa 40:1-11) (Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 265, note 4), and to an analysis of prophetic speech by C. Westermann and W. Zimmerli (P. Ricoeur, *Critique and conviction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 166, notes 1 and 2).

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 265-267; Idem, *Critique and conviction*, 166-176.

function of linking reference and invention by connecting the implied and the intended. To state it in formal terms: it takes the semiotic practice of liturgy (the symbolical acts) through its poetic practice (the rhetorical acts) into the moral practice (ethical acts). Liturgy restructures a religious narrative into a performance to facilitate a religious practice (*μυμῆσεις*⁶²). The structure of prophetic narrative acts as an appropriate biblical guide for that.

To understand liturgy as an enactment seems to me crucial. Liturgy does not simply mediate between God and man, but between the reference to religious traditions on the one hand and the invention of religious practices on the other. In stating that, I am now able to solve an important problem that confronted us before when we were discussing the aesthetical practice of liturgy. It regards the position of the audience vis-à-vis staged agents. As participants of a religious practice, the public is not 'onlooking' but actively participating as a summoned audience. They are involved to the bone since they act in liturgy in the effort of explaining and interpreting the religious call and response that defines their faith. Moreover, in the act of participation it installs their identity as committed witnesses. In that act, the exegetical structure of the prophets reflects the religious characteristics of this liturgical practice by the faithful. They witness a confrontation with God in God's declaration of His Autonomy. Subsequently, it is their – tragic – effort to understand God's call as personal destiny. In addition, the faithful vouch for a responsibility to respond on His behalf while addressing anew a community to which they formerly merely belonged as casual members. Finally, they become the faithful in the act of installing their identity in a perennial tradition of witnesses. This is the practice of liturgy as shared committed and ritualized practice. Liturgy however remains to be performed within the 'kingdom of the as-if'. Liturgy is not a divine but a human effort. This observation is crucial to understand the liturgical practice of summoned subjects in modern times. Liturgy involves an interpretative task to mediate 'autonomous' conscience (*coram seipso*) and obedience of faith (*coram Deo*). Conscience requires the responsible judging of the self, whereas obedience implies the necessity to interpret the symbolic network appertaining to salvation.⁶² Without this recognition, the prophetic genre and the metaphor of call and response fail to be understood as a configuration for liturgical practice.

The Ultimate

I started the former subparagraph by clarifying the explanatory and interpretative functions of liturgy as necessary conditions for religious practice. We however do not define liturgical practices sufficiently if we disregard the perspective

⁶² Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 274.

of the ultimate. Even if one agrees that we adequately understand liturgy as practice in the faith metaphor of call and response, one final question remains. If we are witnesses, of what or before who are we? What, or who, is the ultimate? Is there any way to practice an ultimate perspective in liturgy? In answering these questions, I will first refer to the ultimate in terms of a relevant biblical pericope, namely that of God's disclosure of His Name to Moses (Ex 3:14).⁶³ Subsequently, I will clarify if, how and to what extent liturgy can practice this ultimate perspective.

The call-response experience indicates a witnessing of ultimate reality. The very fact of 'witnessing' presumes that the reality of the ultimate is not one disconnected from our own but one closely related to our identity. A relevant example to illustrate this proposition is Gods disclosure of His Name to Moses. This narrative shows two crucial elements of the ultimate that falsify a notion of Gods identity as one that is opposed to ours. One element is dialogical; the other is action-oriented.

The dialogical element of the ultimate shows in the fact that Gods disclosure of His Name is posited in a vocational narrative. The calling of Moses by God is one in dialogue. After the manifestation of the angel of the Lord in a burning bush, God calls Moses from this bush (Ex 3:4) and following God's account of his covenant, Moses asks for God's Name. Moses does so to clothe his authority before his people as one who validly took up the mission that God requires from him (Ex 3:13). God replies to Moses' question by saying 'I am who I am' (אהיה אשר אהיה; *ego sum qui sum*), immediately followed by 'Say (...) I-am-who-I-am has sent me to you' (Ex 3:14). It takes a lot of talking before Moses – reluctantly – responds by accepting this mission and guide his people out of Egypt (Ex 4:20). At closer look there are two dialogues, one explicit and one implicit. The explicit dialogue is that of Gods' call and Moses response, which puts Moses in the position of a summoned subject. The implicit dialogue is that of Moses' relationship to his people, which puts Moses in the position of a commissioned subject. This Moses story shows that the ultimate is inclusive of the personal relationship of God and man as expressed in call and response, but it is also one relative to the mission to be pursued by the one who is called and responds. The summoned subject and the commissioned subject go together. There is no question to the ultimate character of Moses' disclosure experience. However, God by no means shows Himself as one who transcends

⁶³ For an overview of the topic of Biblical Theophany, see G. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in biblical narrative*, London: Clark, 2005; for an overview of the Moses Theophany, see G. van Kooten (Ed.), *The revelation of the name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the pagan Graeco-Roman world and early Christianity*, Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Moses' interpretative capacities. On the contrary, God puts Himself into dialogue and he does so in order to let Moses dialogize with his people.

An action-oriented element of the ultimate refers to Gods Name itself, which assents to this dialogue by expressing presence instead of being. In the 'I-am-who-I-am', God reveals his Name not as a proposition but as an ongoing action that intervenes in current events. God is not simply there, regardless of a public, but present, that is, approachable to somebody. To state it in formal terms, Gods theophany is of performative nature. God's Name is an action itself, unveiling that which cannot be grasped, but while displaying also appealing to the ultimate concern of that event. It uncloses what dialogue in the end cannot do but close. On the other hand, however, this ultimate concern cannot be interpreted apart from the signs and symbols that treasure this concern from the past and that nourish hope as unconditional trust in the future.⁶⁴ This divine action of Gods' Name therefore requires respect and reverence: it 'elicits recognition and worship as the recipients are not just made privy to a divine secret but are the objects of an act of salvation'.⁶⁵ The unaccomplished tense of the Name emphasises this action as a disclosure of Gods dialogue with man. After Gods account of his presence in the past he pulls the future into perspective as an act of speech. In doing so, He installs a tension between past and future; He hides and reveals; He represents the known and the unknown. Tradition did not emphasise this action-aspect. On the contrary, it highlighted an essentialist characteristic of being. It took the 'I-am-who-I-am' as revealed by God to Moses from the Hebrew context and Judaic view into a Latin context and Greek metaphysical scheme. This requires a Christian effort to 'dehellenize' its onto-theology by re-understanding what God's 'being' is from a Biblical perspective. It can only do so in recognition of the fact that Gods Name confronts us with a polysemic structure that represents a 'gap of meaning' that directs the reader to an enigma. Being therefore is something that requires faith to leave open what cannot be said.⁶⁶

The inaccessibility of Gods identity on the one hand and the need to address this identity as our ultimate concern in signs and symbols on the other hand takes us to the core of liturgical practice. Can we express and address the ultimate perspective, as it lies embedded in our concerns? Liturgy indeed does so. But, again from a Ricoeurian perspective, it can only do so in recognition of a dialectic of silence and speech. Hermeneutics on the one hand cannot offer a

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 45-47.

⁶⁵ A. LaCocque, 'The revelation of revelations', in: A. LaCocque & P. Ricoeur, *Thinking biblically: Exegetical and hermeneutical studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 316.

⁶⁶ P. Ricoeur, 'From interpretation to translation', in: LaCocque & Ricoeur, *Thinking biblically*, 331-361.

solution to the divine enigma while on the other hand its effort is to maintain that it can. Ricoeur clarifies this dialectic as one of manifestation and proclamation.⁶⁷ Manifestation refers to an anti-hermeneutical aspect of the ultimate. Its phenomenology is expressed in the sacred. The sacred is to be understood as manifestation of an overwhelming power, as Otto explained in his phenomenology of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Following Eliade, Ricoeur points at the notion of hierophany to indicate that the sacred is always located at specific times and places and is expressed in a transformation of elements of profane reality. This transformation displays a bond of solidarity between sacred and natural powers. Natural elements such as sky, earth, water, and fire explain the immanence of the ultimate in everyday reality. Usually, this transformation has non-linguistic elements in the ritual. To see nature as sacred involves an act of sacralization, of consecration. Ritual joins the casual and the ultimate. Elements of nature or of daily life gain an 'efficacy' that they did not display before. This 'bound symbolism' invites to an aesthetical judgment. Manifestation remains a confrontation with natural reality, but in its transparency for a sacred universe. Manifestation reflects a 'law of correspondence' between profane and sacred reality. Proclamation on the other hand is typically hermeneutical in that it emphasizes the Word of God, the historicity of tradition and the explanation and interpretation that it requires. Whereas manifestation is based on natural symbolism, a cyclical ordering of time, and an aesthetic appreciation; proclamation requires conceptual symbolism, a historic interpretation of time and an ethical assessment. Proclamation is oriented towards discourse in which the explanation and interpretation of the ultimate takes place. It discloses meaning from texts, and makes readers into hearers summoned to the mission that the text requires.

In liturgical practice, manifestation can be taken as the element of the ultimate that is expressed in sacraments. Ritual presents natural symbolism. It makes elements of nature's universe translucent for a sacred universe. It mediates the immanence of the ultimate. Proclamation on the other hand can be taken as *kerugma* in which the Word of God is explained and interpreted. It mediates the decoding and encoding of the texts in which the testimony of tradition can be invented in daily life. The two go together; they require the imaginative capabilities without which reality is nihilistic with regard to the polysemy of signs, texts, codes and metaphors of the religious traditions. What can be said of religious classics in literature can be maintained for the liturgical tradition as well, namely that it 'figures rich and full projections of another way of being in the world that liberates what is essential by suggesting what is possible'.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Figuring the sacred*, 48-67.

⁶⁸ Wallace, 'Introduction', 15.

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